

## **Meeting of the Sub-Cabinet Senior Summit Working Group on Civic Engagement October 26, 2010**

Attending: Bruce Adams, OCP, Austin Heyman, OCP, Carol Croll, Interages, Ann Evans, Montgomery College, Charles Smith, HHS, Kathleen Meaney Stobie, VolCenter, Michelle Birnbaum, VolCenter, Caiatlin Akorn, VolCenter, Molly Callaway, VolCenter, Cathleen Matthews, Regional Center. Gail Woolf, MCPS/DFCP, Tiffany Lundquist, Maryland AARP, Francine Jamin, Paul Peck Institute, Montgomery College, Micki Gordon, JCA, Jay Kenney, HHS, Leslie Marks, Commission on Aging, Gabe Albernoz, Rec. Dept.

Invited but not attending: Chuck Short, CEO, Karla Silvestre, OCP, Tim Warner, OCP, Lily Qi, OCP, Daniel Koroma, OCP, Mary Anderson, PIO, Pat Myers, OASIS, Grace Whipple, Gaithersburg Center, Danielle Benjamin, COA, Esther Newman, Leadership Montgomery, Lorraine Schack, Rockville Senior Services, Hope Gleicher, Nonprofit Montgomery. Phil Smakula, Rec Dept. Jayne Park, Sara Gottbaum, OWL

We reviewed the status of the action steps set forth in the Senior Summit Action Plan for Civic Engagement, taking into account the severe fiscal crisis facing the county and the community. The following is a report to the sub-cabinet:

We focused our October meeting on two major areas for potential growth: 1) the Pro Bono Consultant (PBC) program, operated by the Volunteer Center and 2) Bringing the Experience Corps to Montgomery County. The PBC program currently involves some 50 volunteers in short-term consulting assignments, primarily with non-profit organizations. Michelle Birnbaum, PBC Coordinator, presented an overview of the current model for recruiting, matching and monitoring volunteers and projects. The challenge is how to grow this successful initiative. Workgroup members suggested some marketing strategies to consider. The goal is to develop a strategic plan to grow the program by recruiting a PBC volunteer skilled in this area.

Carol Croll, Executive Director of Interages described the extensive conversations she has had both with the Experience Corps nationally and several local programs around the country. A principal challenge in bringing this program to Montgomery County will be obtaining sufficient funding for staff. Conversations are on-going.

In addition to the original actions steps it was recognized that there are a number of civic engagement actions which are on-going:

1) The work of the four or five “villages” in the down-county area, which during the past two years have been formed by seniors, and which, not only engage many seniors in their organizing, but will increasingly rely on senior volunteers to implement their activities and services. The interest in the village movement in the county continues to grow to other parts of Montgomery County.

2) The Montgomery County Vital Living Committee, which has been expanded and reorganized and involves over 20 seniors with considerable expertise and experience and which is undertaking a number of specific activities, such as adopting a library to assist the libraries in identifying and co-locating senior information, assisted for the second year with the Over 50 Employment Expo (with help on resume writing and other assistance), is extensively revising the Vital Living Brochure and preparing a new guide, which provides information on learning, volunteer, employment and other options for seniors, which will be available early in 2011.

3) Seniors participate in most of the county advisory groups. In the past year, one in particular, the Veterans Commission, has been created, which engages additional numbers of seniors in serving the community.

4) The Chinese-American Seniors Association has continued to grow and has engaged many older Chinese-Americans in serving their own community, with 183 volunteers and over 1600 members.

## **Current**

### **1) Continue to support intergenerational programs**

The number of youth participants in Interages programs increased from 573 in FY09 to 749 in FY 10.

Interages plans to initiate a Montgomery County Intergenerational Day, which may include the visual and performing arts, and involve a number of county public and private agencies, and possibly include grandparents day in schools –timing will be depend on funding. Interages conducted the first planning meeting for this event by convening the members of the Montgomery County Intergenerational Committee.

Interages has letters of support from Congressman Van Hollen, Governor O'Malley and Ike Leggett supporting an intergenerational Day/Month in October 2011. It is not going to be easy to support this financially. Interages does not have a large enough staff to do all the preliminary work to get this off the ground. The pro bono support person didn't want to take on anything this big. The committee members want to help with the smaller details once the funding and sites are known. Interages is planning to contact several non-profit and government groups in the county, as well as MCPS, with suggestions of intergenerational activities that they can do. The participants would then put on displays or perform during intergenerational month the art, photography, singing, family trees at the site that sponsored the activity. We hope to have activities in Downtown Silver Spring, Blackrock, Strathmore, VisArts, Tacoma Park and others. All depending on the support and interest of those contacted.

Subject to funding availability, the workgroup recognized the potential for developing additional intergenerational programs and relationships at the four new community centers, which will be opened in the next several years

The OASIS Intergenerational Tutoring Program continues in 27 schools in Montgomery County. There are 173 tutors serving 184 students in grades 1-4.

The idea was raised that intergenerational initiatives may be benefited by moving away from stand alone Senior Centers to integrated programming in community centers and public libraries. The Recreation Department indicated that their planning efforts are moving towards this new model of integrated programming. It was also emphasized, however, that many seniors desire “senior only” venues (programs and facilities). Clearly, there is no “one size fits all” on this issue. Shared sites and shared campuses are the way of the future. This has been discussed by the Recreation Department and Interages with Generations United, the national organization for intergenerational policies and programs.

### **2) Continue to support the Ambassador Outreach program to help recruit older adults, to provide information on volunteer opportunities and information on county services.**

The volunteer center plans to continue training some volunteers to serve as an outreach arm of the center to counsel and provide information on volunteer opportunities at public libraries or senior and community centers. It will begin training once it has sufficient number of volunteers to train. However, with reduced resources at both the libraries and the community centers, this plan may need to be revised. The RSVP Director will meet with the libraries and the Vital Living Committee to explore options. There is also the possibility that several members of the Commission on Aging or the Vital Living Committee could be trained to provide information on county services and programs.

Among the best practices identified for further exploration is the Community Ambassador Program for Seniors implemented in Freemont, California. The Director of the RSVP program is following up to explore its relevance to Montgomery County.

**3) Continue to support congregate meal program that bring together seniors in a social setting for meals; including the wide range of ethnic meal sites.**

This program was expanded during the past year through the use of federal funds from the Recovery Act. It has especially grown at sites for Korean and Chinese groups.

**4) Expand the HHS Community Review Model**

DHHS is considering expansion of the Community Review Process to focus on organizations receiving community grants. It is hoping to initiate this shortly.

**5) Continue to provide wide range of programming and activities at senior centers.**

Two new Recreation Department initiatives in 2010 were Montgomery's Got Talent and "Neat" Trips (New Exciting Adult Trips for 55+). Senior Centers and Neighborhood Senior Programs held individual Talent Shows, with the winners from each program site advancing to a county-wide show on May 22, 2010.

A new tour and trip program was marketed to provide outings that were more educational and/or entertaining in nature (i.e. Museums, Smithsonian lectures, science centers, concerts, etc.) Trips were offered at a variety of times including evenings and weekends e.g. attending the Broadway hit "Memphis" in New York City and the Flower Show in Philadelphia.

The Recreation Department intends to build on existing partnerships, such as Holy Cross Hospital and non-profits. Further development of classes for which residents pay, outdoor recreation opportunities, intergenerational programs and speaker's series will be explored.

Major funding restrictions have required reductions in programs offered by the Recreation Department.

**Short-Term**

**1) Expand the Pro Bono Consultant program**

See discussion above.

**2) Research and Planning: investigate best and promising practices that can be applied to Montgomery County**

The workgroup will continue to monitor other practices which might prove beneficial to Montgomery County. In addition to exploring the Community Ambassador Program for Seniors, implemented in Freemont, California, members of the workgroup have examined possible transportation models for seniors aging in place.

Two models reviewed are Partners in Care, an Anne Arundel county program, and NeighborRide, a program implemented in Howard County.

**3) Communication and Outreach efforts to educate seniors about the multiple benefits of volunteerism, including the importance of social connectivity to quality of life, as well as the wide range of activities currently available in the community.**

The Workgroup supports the work of the Communication and Outreach workgroup especially in the following areas:

- Continue the DHHS initiated publications describing county resource for seniors in the Gazette and Beacon newspapers and translate into Chinese, French, and Spanish
- Highlight Libraries as designated areas for displaying senior information
- Continue to refine the county and library websites
- Continue the Commission on Aging's Senior Today show which provides monthly interviews and information pertaining to seniors.
- Enhanced senior presence at county events
- Existing networks, meetings, and partnerships will be utilized to extend outreach resources
- Improving the senior and volunteer center websites to include four or five compelling examples of potential opportunities for RSVP-eligible volunteers with a brief summary of the nonprofit, a link to Volunteer Center's related volunteer activity, a photos of RSVP volunteers on site, and quotes from volunteers and those who have benefited from their contributions. An initial example(Interages) has been shared with the Volunteer Center who will be identifying several others.
- Improve the link between Senior Site and the Volunteer Center b routing directly to the RSVP webpage rather than the main Volunteer Center page.

It was also suggested that the County look into mechanisms by which overall community/social engagement can be fostered, regardless of age. The concept being that seniors benefit from social connections between people of all ages, not merely those involving other older adults. Hence, building social connectedness among all resident will have positive ramifications for seniors. Outreach efforts that include door-to-door out reach(e.g. "neighbors helping neighbors") as well as leveraging social networking media (e.g. Face book) may be cost effective methods to promote social engagement that produce indirect benefits for seniors.

**4) Computer access and training via senior and community centers and libraries**

- Learning to use a computer can enable seniors to acquire skills for employment, socialization and communication.
- JCA runs 4 SeniorTech centers in Montgomery County. During the past calendar year, it has adaded 2 new sites at Holiday Park Senior Center and White Flint Mall. The newest site ata White Flint Mall replaces the recently closed program at the Bethesda Vital Living Center. Classes are held Monday thnrough Friday, from 9:30-3:30pm. Most classes are fully subscribed.
- OASIS has developed a partnership with HOC with OASIS volunteers trained to offer computer classes to residents.
- JCA SCSEP offers a free internet and email training program to adults over 55. This program, Generation Online -GOL is a web-based tutorial program developed for older learners to learn at their own pace with Peer Coaches. Training is held at JCA on Parklawn Drive, Holiday Park Senior Center and at the Adventist Community Center in Silver Spring.
- The Montgomery County Lifelong Learning Institute will be co-listing classes with the Business and Information technology Division of the College's Workforce Development and Continuing Education program.

## **5) Lifelong Learning**

OASIS and Montgomery College's Lifelong Learning Institute are taking their programs to satellite locations, making it easier for older adults to participate in them. OASIS offers 400 classes a year for adults age 50 and over and each semester has approximately 1150 adults enrolled in various classes.

The Paul Peck Institute for American Culture and Civic Engagement at Montgomery College will continue to offer Jefferson Café discussion groups at a variety of sites. The Institute is working on a proposal with Monticello as a partner for a major NEH grant to expand the reach of the Cafes to add a digital component to the discussion so as to be able to reach potential participants who might not be able to come to Café sites.

The Lifelong Learning Institute has developed several partnerships to bring Lifelong Learning Institute classes into the community for more availability for seniors. We have a formal MOU with the Department of Public Libraries and this semester are offering reCareering at 50+ at the Rockville Memorial Library, and the Poetry of Robert Frost at the Davis Library. We are offering several classes at the Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center in Silver Spring, and at the Holiday Park Senior Center in Wheaton. We are also partnering with senior living facilities to offer classes on-site. We have several classes scheduled at Ingleside at King Farm and are working on partnering with Fox Hill as well. The fall semester of the Lifelong Learning Institute has a substantial increase in course offerings and thus far, the registration numbers are substantially up as well. We are currently working on our spring semester offerings. Maryland State residents who are 60 years of age or older qualify for tuition waiver for Montgomery College for-credit classes. Senior tuition waiver students are accepted on a space available basis.

### **Longer-Term**

1) The Serve America Act contains ideas connecting volunteer work to benefits such as college scholarship (Silver Scholarships) However, no funds have been appropriated to date.

The Silver Scholar Education awards would provide a \$1,000 education award to an individual aged 55 or older who performs at least 350 hours of service. Transfer of education award earned in Subtitle C position or as a Silver Scholar is permitted for individuals 55 or older to the individual's child or grandchild who meets the citizenship eligibility requirements for AmeriCorps and attains a high school degree before using. Recipient must use the education award within 10 years of its being earned.

2) Tax credits to seniors for volunteer work in high priority community activities  
This concept, due to the economic conditions, will be deferred.